WAR SUFFERERS' RELIEF BULLETIN

"Not to be ministered unto, but to minister"

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Mennonite Relief in France

By Henry Buller

The Mennonite effort in behalf of war sufferers in France—"Secours Mennonite aux Enfants," as it is officially designated—was initiated in April, 1940. Because of the German occupation, American workers were compelled to leave in January, 1943, and a curtailed program was committed into the hands of Roger Georges, a Frenchman. What was done during the occupation may be read on page four of the March, 1945, issue of the W. S. RELIEF BULLETIN. The present phase of the French work began in March, 1945, when Samuel Goering and Henry Buller were able to cross to the Continent from England. The story from that date to the present is sketched in this article.—Editor.

Samuel Goering and I arrived in Paris in the latter part of March, and after making some preliminary contacts in the French capital we drove southward in the direction of Lyon, to Tournus, near which town we have a children's home. From here we then made an extensive tour visiting Alsace during the Easter week and then once more drove toward Paris. From Paris we then turned southwestward to Ancenis, near which town we visited the Chateau du Vair in view of establishing a children's home there. After a visit at Gensac we proceeded on to the children's home that our organization has been longest interested in: "The Lavercantiere," formerly the convalescent home at Canet-Plage, near Perpignan. It had to be moved into its present quarters when the Germans occupied the Mediterranean coast in November of 1942. From here we returned to Tournus via Lyon and then on to Paris via Dole and Besancon. Altogether we covered about 2,500 miles.

During the month of May, Roger Georges and I re-traveled this entire itinerary, excepting the southern part of it. However, in Alsace we took many more side-trips than in April so that the miles covered during this month were not many less than before; I estimate about 2,000 miles.

On the first of June, Vernon Toews arrived in Paris where I met him and both of us returned to Plottes, to the children's home. About June 12, Mr. Georges returned from another trip to Alsace and then the Hillman van broke down. Until this day we have no other means of transportation but the already overcrowded trains and buses or the very expensive taxis. Toward the latter part of June, Mr. Augustin Coma, one of our Spanish workers, and I went, by train, to Perpignan and on to the Lavercantiere. Shortly after this trip I received the news that Samuel Goering and Orie Miller were in France. After the meeting in Paris I visited the Chateau du Vair, near Ancenis, where we were planning to begin a children's home. I remained only long enough to get Richard Rosenthal, the director for the home, acquainted with the project we had in mind. Then I went back to Paris. The time spent in Paris this time was largely waiting for Samuel Goering and Ellen Harder to come from London. Both finally arrived on July 20 and Brother Goering hurried on to Switzerland. Ellen Harder and I went by train to Tournus, where we stopped off for a day at the children's home at Plottes.

Opening a Center

On Monday, July 23, we took a taxi to Pont-de-Vaux where we began installing what we call our French Center in the former apartment of the Georges family. On this day my extensive traveling ceased, excepting for short side-trips to Macon, Chalon-sur-Saone, Dijon, and Dole in search of a more suitable and bigger place.

Effects of the War

One could see material damage in many, many towns and villages, along the roads. The bridges and the roads are seriously affected. The marks of fighting are everywhere to be found and the physical reconstruction necessary is very large indeed. One of the greatest bottlenecks in this process is the lack of transportation. Everywhere along the roads one can still see the carcasses of burned-out trucks and automobiles; along the railroad tracks the remains of locomotives, flatcars and boxcars as well as passenger coaches are strewn. Add to this the destroyed bridges and damaged roads and the task of reconstruction grows immense—and the lack of materials slows up any quick recovery.

Return of Deportees

With the return of deportees from Germany new grief was brought home to the families. In the first place, many who were eagerly expected back will never return. Others, of the prisoners, found situations upon returning home that have been heart-breaking; loved ones missing through bombardments, through fighting, through shootings. Still others, coming home anxious to take up family life where they were forced to leave off two, three, four, or five years ago, found it impossible.

These are the wounds that are most grievous and sometimes most hopeless. It is here that our "relief" work will meet its real trial and where it should be most ready to bind up the wounds and heal the sores. It is the "impossible" reconciliation that becomes "possible" with the great love of our Master who taught that to give up one's life was to find life eternal. These have been my most intensive impressions: a country with material ruin everywhere, transportation grievously damaged, and social wounds that are numerous and deep. "The harvest (the need) truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore . . . that He will send forth laborers into His harvest."

Notes from the Field

From Naples to Rome.—We left Naples for Rome about nine o'clock Saturday morning. It was a pleasure to drive through an agricultural region again after such a long time on the sand. After a brief stop at Caserta, we continued on northward over mountain and through valleys and along the seacoast. Everywhere were signs of the terrible struggle that went on there for so long. Industry, transportation, and communications were virtually wiped out. Most factories have gone into rubble, many homes are the same way, and most of those still standing show bullet marks on them like a hailstorm leaves marks on a freshly painted building. They seem to be harvesting crops now. Mile after mile we saw vineyards where the white grapes were being harvested and all along the way were roadside stands with grapes and melons for sale, although now I cannot recall one single customer at any of the stands for the military lorries are usually too much in a hurry and most of the transportation is military. Accidents are still numerous in that area by careless people wandering into live mines.—Delvin Kirchhofer.

Displaced Persons.—C. F. Klassen is here in interest of displaced persons, especially Mennonites. He has visited Sweden, Denmark, France and the American zone of occupation in Germany, yet his work has scarcely begun. He is now proceeding to Holland and from there he goes back to Germany. One's heart is saddened there to hear of conditions.—Samuel Goering.

Needs in Alsace-Lorraine.—Relief goods and transportation are our big needs here just now so far as things material are concerned. The Mennonites in Alsace-Lorraine are scattered far and wide and ministration to them will involve much travel. Someone of spiritual conviction with business capacity should be secured to work this field. The Mennonites in this area are very, very ready to share in the Christian-Mennonite witness to the world. Their suffering and the contacts that have now been possible with more than two hundred Mennonite homes have produced a very favorable situation so far as cooperation between American and European Mennonites is concerned.—M. C. Lehman.

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Thinking about Relief

The Winter in Europe

Many newspapers and periodicals during the first week in October carried reports regarding extremely severe food and fuel shortages in Europe and pointed out that famine conditions will prevail in the months ahead unless drastic action is taken. It is unfortunate that these reports could not have been released before this late hour and aroused us earlier to a clearer consciousness of the dire want. But even in the late fall and early winter months we will need to give ourselves to relief service as we never have before. The work of a private agency, such as the M.C.C., seems indeed very small in the presence of the total situation, yet we will need to follow through wholeheartedly the tasks that God has called us to. It is to be hoped, too, that government relief organizations will be able to function rapidly and on a larger scale in the months ahead.

While the need in all Europe seems to be great, it appears as though Germany will suffer most severely. Editorially, **The Christian Century,** October 3, reports a movement among English church leaders for a further voluntary reducement of the already restricted British ration in order to provide food for the German people. It is feared that "at least 13,000,000 Germans must die before winter if nothing is done." **Time,** October 1, ran a report from Germany which stated that shovel squads are digging extra graves before the ground freezes to prepare for the expected death of 100,000 Berliners. M. C. Lehman, from Basel on September 10, reports to the Akron Office, "The food, clothing, and fuel situation in Germany this coming winter is going to be terribly desperate. The Swiss press which is quite reliable tells of awful conditions which are perhaps not as yet coming into the American papers."

Relief service in behalf of the German people by the M.C.C. has not begun in Germany as yet because the door is closed for private relief agencies to enter. It is to be hoped that somehow something will be done to open the door for all who wish to help before the winter advances.

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord.—Proverbs 19:17.

Corrections

By an oversight of the proofreader, the word "but" was omitted in the second line of the explanatory note accompanying the map showing location of Mennonite congregations in Holland, in the September, 1945, issue of the Bulletin. The sentence in which the mistake was made should read: "The map of Holland printed here indicates the location of all but six of the Dutch Mennonite congregations. . . ."

The article, "The Mennonite Central Committee in Paraguay," in the June, 1945, issue of the Bulletin was written by Robert Geigley and not by Willard H. Smith. We regret that this mistake was made.

The food problem in the liberated nations of western Europe is so urgent that action must be taken immediately if hungry people are to carry through the next few months, said Herbert Hoover in a recent radio address.

FROM "SIEGE"

In the deserted suburbs,
sitting on the stone steps
are the children who could not run
away.

Staring at the ruins,
they whimper and do not understand
the widening pain in their bodies,

nor the bellies swollen
with the sharp paradox of hunger,
and the motherless evenings.

They must remain here until
one by one they stumble to the
ground
and the heart simply stops.

Riders through the hidden towns
come upon these pitifully slain,
who bear no sign of wound or sorrow
but are merely unalive, like toys.

—Norman Rosent, in "The Fourth Decade and Other Poems." Used by permission of publisher, Farrar and Rhinehart.

Experiences in Dutch Relief Service

We keep ourselves busy making contacts and preparing for the work of the winter. After untangling meters and meters of Dutch tape and a wait of seven weeks, we have finally moved from our hotel rooms into a neat six-room apartment. We already have visions of growing pains when our unit expands, but the garden shed and next-door pension offer room for expansion. If we don't soon acquire more furniture, the sitting room rug will make a soft foundation for more quilts and bedding. We do have enough beds and dishes to go around now, but a birthday dinner and a tea in honor of a member of the A.D.S. Executive Committee were spread on an American crazy quilt on the sitting room rug!

Interests in Amsterdam

Amsterdam with its network of tree-lined canals, endless bicycles, sputtering barges, and historic buildings is a charming city. It is much cleaner and very different from London. The ancient customs, old and priceless library, seminary, and even the architecture of the Singel Church are a source of interest and exploration. The use of the new hymn books for the first time today was an event in the musical history of the Doopsgezinde Gemeente. Formerly, if one chanced to sit in a pew under the balcony, one might use a hymnal appended to an eighteenth century Bible. Our office and clothing depot are housed in the church property, too. Amongst other equipment, the office boasts four bright red, plush chairs, a fine view of the Singel Gracht and a busy section of the Singel Straat, and a glimpse of the dome of the queen's palace. Until the end of the month a famous collection of Dutch masters in art is being shown at the museum for the first time since the war. I'm enjoying my work in Amsterdam—even cycling to work! By the end of my term I'll be able to balance a bale of clothing behind me with one hand, guide the bike with the other, and signal with my feet like a true Amsterdammer!

The Doopsgezinde Jongeren Bond (young people) held their first large meeting since the war's end at Amsterdam last week-end. The program was social, educational, and religious. Freda Dyck and I were very much interested in the two lectures on the question of nonresistance, which is a very important issue at the present time. Dr. W. F. Golterman—"The Gospel and the Use of Force." Ds. T. O. M. H. Hylkema—"The Gospel and Nonresistance." It was interesting to note that in the discussion period following the first lecture there was a definite leaning toward nonresistance. The question of the trial and execution of war criminals is also causing a stir in the churches.

Assisting Russian Mennonites

We are doing what we can to "mother" the thirty-three Russian Mennonite refugees. Two trips to Maastricht were made to arrange for their stay at Fredeshiem in Friesland during the winter. More trips will have to be made, as soon as there is a driver for our truck, to transport coal from Maastricht to Fredeshiem. (Fredeshiem is a Doopsgezinde Broederschaps home ideally situated amongst native pines and otherwise used for summer holidays and conferences.) Monday I went to Fredeshiem with Dr. Hylkema to determine their clothing needs. Most of them had only the clothing they stood up in! And that had been given to them at Maastricht. One droll, little chap said he went to bed when his clothes were being washed. The change in appearance from the first time I saw them six weeks ago until last Monday was remarkable. The hopeless, worried, and hunted look had given way in many instances to one of assurance and security. However, there is much room for improvement before the marks which make a young widow of twenty look like thirty-five or forty and which make men and women of thirty-five and forty appear to be more than fifty-five are erased. The future of Mennonite refugee work promises to be an interesting and growing task.

Trips to Maastricht, Arnhem, Nijmegen, Wageningen, and other regions along the Rhine and Maas Rivers make the headlines of last winter's war news strike home. Huge bridges collapsed in the rivers, shell torn homes and trees, deserted war machinery and ammunition, the sounds of exploding land mines, and rubble and debris everywhere make the war seem ever so much more near than the more or less cleaned up areas of London's bombing. I wonder that the people have the heart and enthusiasm to rebuild.—Elma Esau.

Glimpses of Relief Fields

The excerpts printed here have been taken from Orie Miller's diary, written during his recent visit to relief areas in Northwest Europe, The Middle East, and India. Brother Miller left New York on June 13 and returned to Akron on October 5.—Editor.

England, June 17. We left M.C.C. London Headquarters at 8:00 a.m. and followed the old Roman road north to Coventry. A perfect June day and beautiful countryside. Coming into Coventry one still notes army tanks and trucks stored for miles on half the double road. We stopped at the bombed-out cathedral and at a workers' camp now used for Dutch children.

England, June 19. Today is the time for biweekly transfer of convalescent boys in and out of Taxal Edge. Ten of the twenty were at breakfast in their own clothes—a sign that they are to leave. Six workers handle this program: John Coffman, Eileen Coffman, Martha Rupel, and three English workers.

Holland, June 25. First impressions: bombing destruction at The Hague almost indescribable; acres and square miles of ruined buildings much of which is just rubble. On the roads were many walking or cycling folks and a few government and military cars. Here in Amsterdam there was no destruction by bombing, but there are no trolleys, taxis, electricity, heat or fuel, and very little food. Our hotel meal last evening of fish, potatoes, and spinach with soup was $6.00 each. There are no goods in shop windows of clothing stores. Many cyclists clatter along on rims. . . .

T. O. M. H. Hylkema says minimum food is now available to all and some special things for the sick. But the area seems completely stripped of transportation other than cycles, all tools, machinery, clothing, fuel. To Hylkema, today is a paradise compared to the starvation days. To our viewpoint life still hangs on just by a thread. Hylkema took us along to the Singel church—today was communion day and 250 partook. Following the service we visited two feeding centers and at one of them ate the daily allotment for our lunch. I never want to visit a more sorely stricken place or people than this unless having the means of relief along.

Holland, June 25. Hylkema took us on an hour's inspection of feeding centers. It rained and the hundreds—many with starved-looking faces—are standing in queues. What a pitiable sight! About 3,000 a day are fed where we first stopped. At 4:30 we went to the home of H. Craandijk, Secretary of the Algemeene Doopsgezinde Societeit. A group of six were present. We soon agreed with them that Holland M.C.C. Headquarters should be in Amsterdam. They will make available a house with furnishings for our workers' living quarters and a relief office on the Singel church premises.

France, July 2. We arrived at Tournus this morning. As no one met us we walked out to the Mennonite children's home at Plottes. Forty-seven children at this home today—ages 3 to 13. A staff of eight women; one maintenance man beside Vernon Toews. The home is a chateau belonging to a Protestant missionary who is now in Syria. It is a quiet country spot with nice hillside grounds for children to play. The staff prepared a wonderful meal for us at noon. The home seems capably managed.

Egypt, July 14. This morning at 8:30 we left by U.N.R.R.A. courier truck for the El Shatt camp near the canal and the town of Suez. We saw all our workers and had three group meetings of fellowship, prayer, and discussion for further M.C.C. plans in the Middle East.

India, July 29. Yesterday we looked around a little in Calcutta. This city has four million people now—probably the world's fourth or fifth largest city in size of population—but had only two million ten years ago. First we drove out to the Parsee Towers of Silence, a nicely kept garden. In the center are two towers in which the dead are laid and vultures soon dispose of them and rains wash the bone dust away. . . . In the afternoon we went to the Hindu burning ghats. Behind the ghats the dead are burned—all Hindu dead are cremated. There was a constant wailing, clanging of instruments, and heat from the burnings. Then we walked to Cali Ghat the largest temple to Cali in the world and after whom Calcutta was named. A dirty priest showed us about the compound of buildings—blood and animal stench, hideous-looking gods, dirty and poverty-stricken worshippers, and people about everywhere. There seemed to be nothing of an esthetic or inspiring nature and the priest complained of the inadequate tip we gave him—the most depressing visit of the day.

Ethiopia, September 4. Addis Ababa is 8,000 feet above sea level and thus always cool, although in the same latitude as Calcutta and San Juan, Puerto Rico. The rainy season has begun and it is now raining some every day. Samuel Yoder and Ervin Hooley had a good report to give of their previous three-weeks contacts and work here.

This morning we drove out to the Addis Ababa Leprosarium. This had been built by the Sudan Inland Mission but during the Italian occupation was taken over by the government. There are 262 inmates here with an Australian nurse in charge. She is very devoted to her work but additional workers are needed.

Addis Ababa has 129,000 people and covers an enormous area. There is much poverty, unsanitation, and sickness. Filth is in evidence everywhere. This surely is a needy country.

Egypt, September 8. All Mennonite, Middle East folks met this morning in Cairo—except Martha Eiman; she couldn't get her visa cleared. Richard Yoder leaves Monday for London and then home. Arthur Jahnke in a week will join the Italy unit. Nancy R. Hernley will leave on October 1 for Addis Ababa, and Mary Emma Showalter about then for Northwest Europe. It was a farewell service for all of us.

Italy, September 9. The present four M.C.C. folks in Italy are assigned to two refugee camps in Italy's heel—near Lecce and di Leuca. The workers seem happy and are challenged by the service. . . . Naples and its people still look drab, depressed and shabby. It was grape season and we ate the best grapes I believe I ever had.

France, September 14. Henry Buller, John L. Horst, M. R. Zigler, Eldon Burke, C. F. Klassen, Samuel Goering, M. C. Lehman, Roger Georges, and I met on Thursday morning at the new Paris Center, 16 Bis Rue Molitor. We were together most of two days and have done everything that can be done in Paris now. . . . We left Paris at 9 a.m., Dieppe at 2:30 p.m. This gave me a chance to see at a closer range the destruction that war has wrought. It still looks terrible. I was most impressed in Paris this time at the fantastic exchange rate and the resultant high prices. Prices seem about four times as high as normal. This is a pretty rough Channel trip. Most of the folks are sick.

—Orie O. Miller.

The Bible School of Colonia Fernheim

It has been the policy of the Fernheim Colony in Paraguay to conduct a Bible school each year even if only for several weeks. This year the term will be six weeks. It is especially designed for those who are not able to attend the Central Schule, an eight-months' high school, and who otherwise have no educational opportunities. It also has as an objective the training of Sunday school workers and those interested in other religious activities.

Since the school has no building of its own, it has often been a "Wanderschule" (a wandering school). That is, each village would house the students for several weeks and thus it would travel from village to village in one school term. This year, however, it is housed in the former Legiehn residence which the colony has purchased. The school occupies only one room of this building. Into this one room we crowd nineteen students, and this the Bible school. Eight of our students drive back and forth each day, the others room and board in Filadelfia.

The work is divided among three teachers since no full-time teacher was available. Brother N. Siemens teaches two hours in the morning. He has classes in Bible Geography. Then Mrs. W. Hiebert goes down for an hour to teach Bible Characters. Following this hour she has a half hour of singing, sewing, or recreation with the students. Then the students have recess till two o'clock. At two o'clock I go down for two hours of instruction. We are working on the five books of Moses and an introduction to the New Testament. At four o'clock the school is dismissed.

Our students range in ages from thirteen to twenty. In school grades they range from fifth to seventh graders. A good many have not even finished the prescribed six grades of village school offered in the colony. The work, therefore is elementary. The Bible school means a lot to the young people. Their work and life have been so exceedingly limited that we feel they are gaining much from this experience over and above what they learn during class periods.—Waldo Hiebert.

To pity distress is but human; to relieve it is godlike.—H. Mann.

Peace Notes

Demobilization

The release of C.P.S. men has not yet begun, in spite of rumors and the announcements of a system of discharge. The church agencies and the C.P.S. men themselves seemed to be willing to grant Selective Service the opportunity to release C.O.'s a bit slower than discharges were made from the armed forces, but so much time has already elapsed and ten percent of the inducted forces of the Army have been discharged that it can now be said definitely that C.O.'s are being discriminated against.

Selective Service indicated their intentions, shortly after V-E Day, to proceed with the demobilization of C.P.S. men proportionately to the number of men released from the armed forces. The objection of several Congressmen and the proposal of legislation forbidding the demobilization of C.P.S. men on a point system stalled these earlier intentions. More recently Congressional objections were removed and it was thought Selective Service would proceed with a plan for "systematic release." Such, however, has not been the case. The factor stalling the demobilization machinery this time was pointed out to be the severe criticism of C.P.S. discharges by several veteran groups. The agencies felt that plans should move ahead on the principles which had been decided upon rather than upon political expediency. At the time of this writing there are new indications that certain categories of C.P.S. men can be released soon but just what would happen no one would predict until there was an actual discharge.

Preparation for Demobilization

The camp council at the C.P.S. unit at Greystone, New Jersey, State Hospital recently decided that "some big jobs need to be done now so that demobilization of C.P.S. does not result in demobilization of our Christian lives and testimony." Among other things they decided to set themselves to the following tasks: (1) "to develop new leadership to take over when more experienced men are released;" (2) "to seek to prepare men to return to their home churches and communities by encouraging clarity of ideas and ability of expression;" (3) "to deepen an understanding of the total significance of nonresistant Christianity and its application to all of life;" (4) "to encourage personal devotional habits which will support our religious idealism even after losing the fellowship of C.P.S."

Special Schools in C.P.S.

In spite of indications of C.P.S. demobilization, sufficient interest is shown in the camps to warrant the continuation of all eight special schools in M.C.C.-C.P.S. Special schools include the four Farm and Community Schools—three at the Lincoln units and one at Terry, Christian Life Schools at Hagerstown and Harrisburg, and the Psychiatry and Christian Service School at Marlboro. With the coming of the fall and winter months these schools will begin their program on somewhat the pattern they set up in 1944. However, an effort to expand these schools is not being made until more definite information regarding demobilization is received.

Christian Workers' School

After a year of experience in the Christian Workers' School at the Harrisburg C.P.S. unit, the need for and the continuation of such an activity while in camp was stated in the following terms:

"We who have chosen Civilian Public Service have done so because our philosophy of life is based primarily upon a religious foundation. We believe that the life of sacrificial service which Christ exemplified is the life most worthwhile. The world of today with its crying moral and spiritual need presents to us an unprecedented challenge—a challenge to prepare ourselves now for serving those who are in need. Many men are now being thoroughly trained for material and military duties. How much more should we devote ourselves to systematic training which will help us to be more useful in work of spiritual value! We do not know what our eventual field of service may be; but we do know that there is a work for every earnest and zealous Christian."

"I am no longer a C.O."

The following letter was received from a young man who at one time declared himself a conscientious objector but is now in the armed forces. He enclosed a check for $50 with his letter.

"I am no longer a conscientious objector or a Christian. I wish I could believe, but I cannot. I am too deeply involved in the destruction machinery of this sinful world. I hope, however, that you will accept the enclosed check to help another man with more courage than I."

M.C.C. Relief Policy

The following items of policy are taken from the Mennonite Central Committee Handbook. They were officially adopted at the Annual Meeting, January 2, 1942.

I. That the intent and influence of the program be to relieve need regardless of the recipient's race, class, or political sympathies and that relief projects be accepted and organized that can be properly supervised by American personnel and consistently administered in a Christian manner and as an evangelical witness to Christian love.

II. That as far as possible projects for relief be undertaken or supported that may be continued and that the plans for same in any given area involve a monthly expenditure of a size that the work in such area may warrant an American worker to be in supervisory charge.

III. That the first attention in any survey of need be given to children and mothers and that in general those areas of need be studied and relief in them undertaken that are neglected by the larger national and the more partisan relief organizations.

IV. That in the setting up of local organization or in subsidizing relief organizations already in existence or in hiring of native personnel in any administrative capacity, the utmost endeavor be made to make only such choices in which the viewpoint and ideals of the M.C.C. are shared—this so that the connection with the M.C.C. organization confirm and add to the witness of Christian love.

V. That in areas where larger or national relief organizations meet mass needs, that our program be so planned that it supplements this service and wherever possible may help to provide channels for such mass relief distribution.

VI. That all our workers, especially directors, seek to promote and maintain a spiritual atmosphere in connection with their organized relief service and wherever practicable use the traditional Mennonite meeting patterns, including singing, Scripture reading, prayer, and the word of testimony or exhortation.